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Menopause and HIV

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Together, we can change the course of the HIV epidemic...one woman at a time.

#onewomanatatime

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What Is Menopause?

Menopause: Point in time when ***menstrual periods have stopped***

- Often called “change of life”
- Normal part of life for women and other people who menstruate



What Is Menopause?

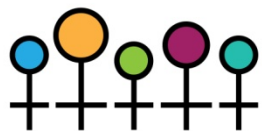
- *Perimenopause*: time of transition leading up to a person's final menstrual period
- Cisgender (cis) women usually experience menopause between ages of 38 and 58; average age is 51
- Some evidence that women living with HIV and particularly lifetime survivors may experience changes of menopause earlier; symptoms may be more intense
 - More research needed to support these reports

What Is Menopause?

- ***Changes of menopause begin*** when:
 - Ovaries (reproductive organs containing eggs) naturally begin to slow down making **estrogen** and **progesterone** (hormones associated with female sex)
- When you ***near menopause***:
 - Estrogen levels drop
 - Stop having regular cycles
 - Eventually can no longer get pregnant

What Is Menopause?

- You have passed through perimenopause and ***entered menopause*** when:
 - Body has completed these changes (one to ten years or more)
 - You have not had period for 12 months in a row
- Lack of research on menopause in transmasculine or nonbinary individuals and others who were assigned female at birth
 - Anyone who has or previously had ovaries can experience menopause

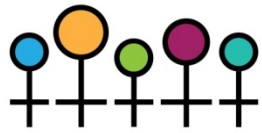


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Symptoms and Conditions

During perimenopause, hormone levels rise and fall unevenly. People may experience:

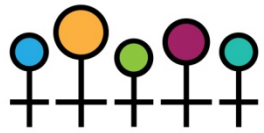
- Increasingly irregular periods
 - Change in frequency, duration, amount
- Hot flashes, night sweats
- Mood swings
- Depression
- Irritability
- Vaginal dryness
- Forgetfulness
- Trouble sleeping, fatigue
- Lack of sexual desire
- Skin changes including:
 - Thinner skin
 - Wrinkling
 - Acne



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Symptoms and Conditions

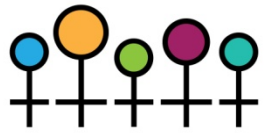
- Cis women living with HIV who experience sweats at night may be ***misdiagnosed*** with menopause-related hot flashes
 - Their sweats may be result of HIV
- Vaginal dryness can be mistaken for a yeast infection
- Keep track of menstrual cycles
 - Report any changes to healthcare provider
 - Can avoid incorrect diagnosis or hormonal treatments that may not be necessary



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Symptoms and Conditions

- People living with HIV ***may experience menstrual cycle changes*** even if not going through menopause
 - Speak to healthcare provider if you have any symptoms described above
 - Find out if related to HIV, menopause, or both
 - May be helpful to have hormone levels checked if <45
- ***Medical concerns*** that can develop after menopause:
 - Osteoporosis (bone loss)
 - Cardiovascular (heart) disease
 - Urinary incontinence (leaking, more frequent urination)

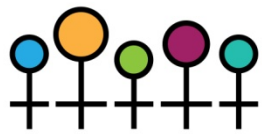


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Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)

Replacing estrogen the body no longer makes can relieve symptoms of menopause

- Women who have a uterus usually take estrogen with progesterone (**hormone replacement therapy, HRT**)
 - Used to be recommended, but long-term use now questioned; research shows increased cancer risk
 - May be appropriate for a short time
 - Patches, creams, vaginal rings may not carry same risk
- Women who had uterus removed can take estrogen by itself (**estrogen replacement therapy, ERT**)



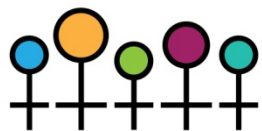
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Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)

- Talk to provider about HRT
 - Provider needs to know **all** drugs and treatments you take, including over-the-counter and street drugs, herbs, etc.
 - Provider also needs to know whether you smoke cigarettes
- ***HIV drugs can reduce effectiveness of hormones***
 - Includes contraceptive pills with estrogen and progesterone
- Estrogen can also cause lower levels of HIV drugs
 - Risk for rising viral load, HIV drug resistance
- Women taking HIV drugs have ***good results using pills and other hormonal contraceptives***

Alternative Treatments

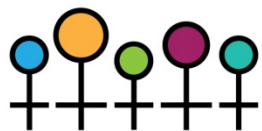
- Complementary/alternative therapies for symptoms:
 - Traditional Chinese Medicine (e.g., acupuncture, Chinese herbs)
 - Eating foods that contain plant-based estrogens (also called phytoestrogens; e.g., soy, flax seeds)
 - Herbal or botanical supplements (e.g., black cohosh, red clover, dong quai, kava, ginseng)
 - Antidepressant drugs and/or counseling
 - Mindfulness training
- Some may have unwanted side effects or interact with HIV drugs
 - Often not regulated by U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)
 - Not required to prove effectiveness in the same way as standard therapies
- **Consult skilled practitioner and let regular provider know what you are doing**



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Keeping Healthy After Menopause

- Eat a healthy diet and maintain a healthy weight
- Have bone health checked; ask provider about specific treatment to prevent bone loss:
 - Calcium supplements
 - FDA recommends women over 50 take $\geq 1,200$ mg calcium/day
 - Calcium supplements may interfere with certain HIV drugs
 - Speak to your provider before taking them
 - Prescription drugs to prevent bone loss
- Have vitamin D level checked; take supplements as instructed by provider
- Quit or cut down on smoking



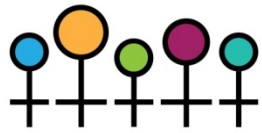
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Keeping Healthy after Menopause

- Quit drinking or use alcohol moderately
- Be physically active:
 - Aerobic or cardiovascular activity for 30 minutes, 5x/week (brisk walking, etc.) can prevent cardiovascular disease
 - Muscle-strengthening activity 2x/week can prevent bone loss
- Mammogram every 1-2 years
- Pelvic exam as often as recommended
 - With cervical cancer screening test (for those with a uterus)
- Get your cholesterol, triglycerides checked regularly
- Get screening test for colon cancer

Taking Care of Yourself

- Menopause may signal the end of a person's fertility, but ***it is not the end of femininity or sexuality***
 - Some people experience mild, tolerable symptoms
 - Others' symptoms are severe; impact quality of life
- Decisions about treatment options are up to each person
 - Discuss concerns, questions with provider to weigh risks and benefits



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Learn More!

- To learn more, and for links to articles featuring more details, please read the full fact sheet:
 - [Menopause and HIV](#)
- For more fact sheets and to connect to our community of women living with HIV, visit:
 - www.thewellproject.org
 - [@thewellprojecthiv.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/@thewellprojecthiv)
 - www.facebook.com/thewellproject
 - www.instagram.com/thewellprojecthiv/
 - www.threads.net/@thewellprojecthiv
 - www.youtube.com/thewellprojecthiv